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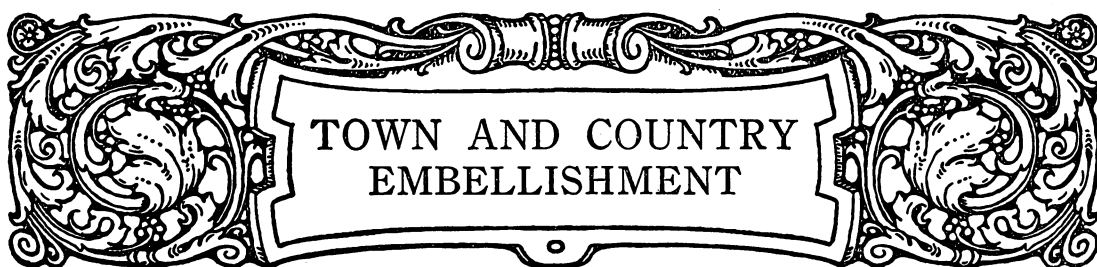
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THE GAS-TANK NUISANCE

By GEORGE MARTIN HUSS

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IN city life we must have utilities and conveniences. If these are housed, why should the houses or housing not be comely and artistic instead of ugly and repellant—be their sizes what they may?

Take for instance the huge monstrosities storing the supplies of illuminating gas. Why not make these agreeable to look at, if we can do it by wedding Art and Utility—giving the now atrocious form a finish, which would make them even grand—by putting a DOME on them?

In Europe there are scores of beautiful cities without hog-wallows, broken fences, cow lots, unpainted houses and mud and muck of all sorts. On the contrary one always sees evidences everywhere of cleanliness, grace, taste in adorning and beautifying, even to the disposition of a tree or the turning of a hedge, not to speak of the marvelous roads, in perfect repair, devoid of ruts and guiltless of even an inequality of surface!

At the recent Panama-Pacific Exposition one was impressed by the graceful and imposing effect produced by the Domed structures on every side. Why not take a hint from this effective use of the Dome?

We spend mints of money on a cathedral, on a custom-house, on mercantile palaces and on private ones, too, and yet, when it comes to a mere public utility, it does not seem possible to arouse our people or private individuals to see the advisability of so dressing these humdrum utilities that they shall be artistic and pleasing to the eye.

The mere fact that a mass of material is so disposed that it is pleasing to the eye does not necessarily mean that the expense of so doing is prohibitive.

Some time ago an effort was made to improve the appearance of the so-called back-yards of our dwellings.

Photographs were shown in which the dilapidated and unkempt condition of these back-yards was forcefully depicted; then, alongside of these, were views of the same yards after a cleaning-up and a little planting had been accomplished and all at a small expenditure of time and money. Why not apply the same principle to other City Pests?

One of the principal reasons why the nineteenth century was so barren of creative decorative art was because the decorative arts had ceased to hold the high position they had occupied in the earlier centuries. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries workers in metals were counted as Artists, just as the great painters and sculptors were, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cabinet-making was a branch of Architecture, and received the attention of the best architects. When these arts are restored to their proper places we may look for inspired work. Too often, also, the army of workers in the various fields of art are

purely individual artisans. In many cases the story is simply a repetition of vocational misdirection, of efforts in unprofitable fields; of time wasted through lack of knowledge and experience. When will cease this economic loss through lack of special ability, or wrongly directed talent, or failure to learn specific, technical requirements, or imperfect knowledge of the needs of many different fields of endeavor?

In considering what shall be done with public utilities, whose physical evidence offends the eye of people of refinement and culture, one must not forget that the property rights of our neighbors and the good of the public must be respected.

Suppose a man has invested many thousands of dollars in a building: there is no doubt he has a fundamental right to insist that his values shall not be needlessly impaired by the ruthless erecting close to his property of a huge and hideous Gas Tank.

Air, water and land cannot be absolutely owned by any man.

It is said that about fifty-two men own about ninety per centum of all the land in England. Suppose, in consequence of any untoward circumstance or freak of nature, that these fifty-two men should all agree in saying: "On January First we shall order every one living upon our land to get off!" And suppose they should carry out their threat, and issue the orders, what would happen? Can any one suppose that thirty-five of the forty millions of people in England would plunge at once like rats into the sea, because the fleets of the world could not ferry them over the Continent? Decidedly not! But what would happen is—that the fifty-two English landowners and mincemeat would be synonymous terms!

An estate, in *fee simple*, is one of inheritance, free from condition or limitation—no matter how large the estate. But, because it is without condition or limitation does not mean that the owner can Misuse or abuse it at will; he owns the *use* of it and can make *use* of the *use* of it, because the State, which protects the landowner from slaughter by the ignorant who envy him, has a prior claim on his land and he must, therefore, use it to the best advantage of the community first and himself last. But he has absolutely no moral right to Create, or Maintain any sort of Nuisance upon his land, no matter what his legal rights may be, under an imperfect civilization, a nuisance that is injurious to the health of the body or the soul of the community.

It is lamentably true that landowners do misuse their privileges. This is due to the imperfect organization of society.

There is, however, all over the world a steady progress toward making laws, not to take away land from landowners but to prevent them abusing

the land which they hold in fee simple, and forcing them to Abate all Nuisances that are offensive to the sense of smell and of hearing, but, above all, to the sense of Sight!

In a recent critique it is stated that Joseph Pennel says: "The gasometers are built inside the great castles, and so become picturesque instead of eyesores," by which he really meant that, in Germany, the thing which men call a gasometer is a hideous thing and astutely hidden by the Germans in the inside of a faked old castle.

Property values are not safe when physical possession only is guaranteed. Change of environment can enhance or destroy these values. If, by beautifying the external appearance of these necessary and unavoidable utilities, property values may be conserved—even perhaps increased, why should not a determined effort be made to start a movement which shall eventually beautify the environment instead of intensifying the gruesome ugliness of these necessities? In its last analysis civilization means the getting rid of all nuisances that worry, annoy and distress the body, mind and soul of a cultured man.

In the accompanying illustrations actual photographs of existing gasometers are shown and suggestions made for so changing the external outlines that the nightmares, which are, alas, only too common, shall be relegated to the "has-beens."

George Martin Huss

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REMARKS BY THE EDITORS:

Every tyro in æsthetics knows that a severely angular, box-like outline is ugly and unpleasing to the eye in ratio of its size: because the eye is Jostled about, in the Corners of the Outline.

Therefore, no greater eyesore than a picture frame—without ornament and devoid of a picture with its varied, graceful or pyramidal lines. And the larger this box-like contraption, the greater sinner it is—as an eyesore.

Now, what makes a mountain sublime? The fact that it is Pyramidal. What makes the Capitol at Washington so sublime a building? Its dome! Why? Because it is—pyramidal.

Now, suppose we Pyramidalize our Gas Tanks, to a certain extent—by putting a Dome-like Finish on them?

On one of the accompanying illustrations we see the repellant Gas Tank by the side of the Viaduct at 130th Street and Riverside Drive. It cries out aloud for a Finish of some kind, a Completion in some style of architecture. The want of such a finish makes it the greatest æsthetic Nuisance in these United States. Because it is, probably, the largest tank in the country, and therefore the Ugliest. And then it is planted right where every

citizen, when looking up the Hudson to enjoy the fine view, has his view spoiled and his "eyes smashed," to quote Diderot, by this huge architectural monstrosity and æsthetic atrocity.

It is a blatant disgrace to New York because it advertises to the world, with a big bass-drum sort of insistence, the crass materiality of our civilization, blunting the taste of our people, preventing the development of the high taste of our citizens and bringing upon us the contempt of all travelers of culture—with the inevitable loss in commerce that is brought about by our reputation for bad taste in everything. If by any possibility it could be removed it should be removed instantaneously. If not, why not make the owners Sink the tank under ground? It can easily be done. Why should they be allowed, to destroy the land values of the entire neighborhood, by maintaining a public, æsthetic nuisance?

It may be answered: "We make progress by evolution and not by revolution, and we must not go too fast!"

Agreed!

But then, if we cannot remove these Gas Tanks out of sight, we can at least Ennoble them, somewhat, by improving their lines.

Illustration Number Two shows the same Gas Tanks, exactly as in Number One, but finished off with a dome-like carrying-up of the steel uprights which support the tank-frame. This change gives to the ugly mass a certain finish, a solemnity and grandeur, vastly less disagreeable and shocking than its present ugliness.

Of course, the next best plan to burying the tank in the earth would be to encase the tank in a handsome wall, covered by a fine dome. Then the thing would be a sublime object instead of an eyesore. And some day this will be done.

For the time being, and in order not to be revolutionary, let us proceed slowly, but—Proceed!

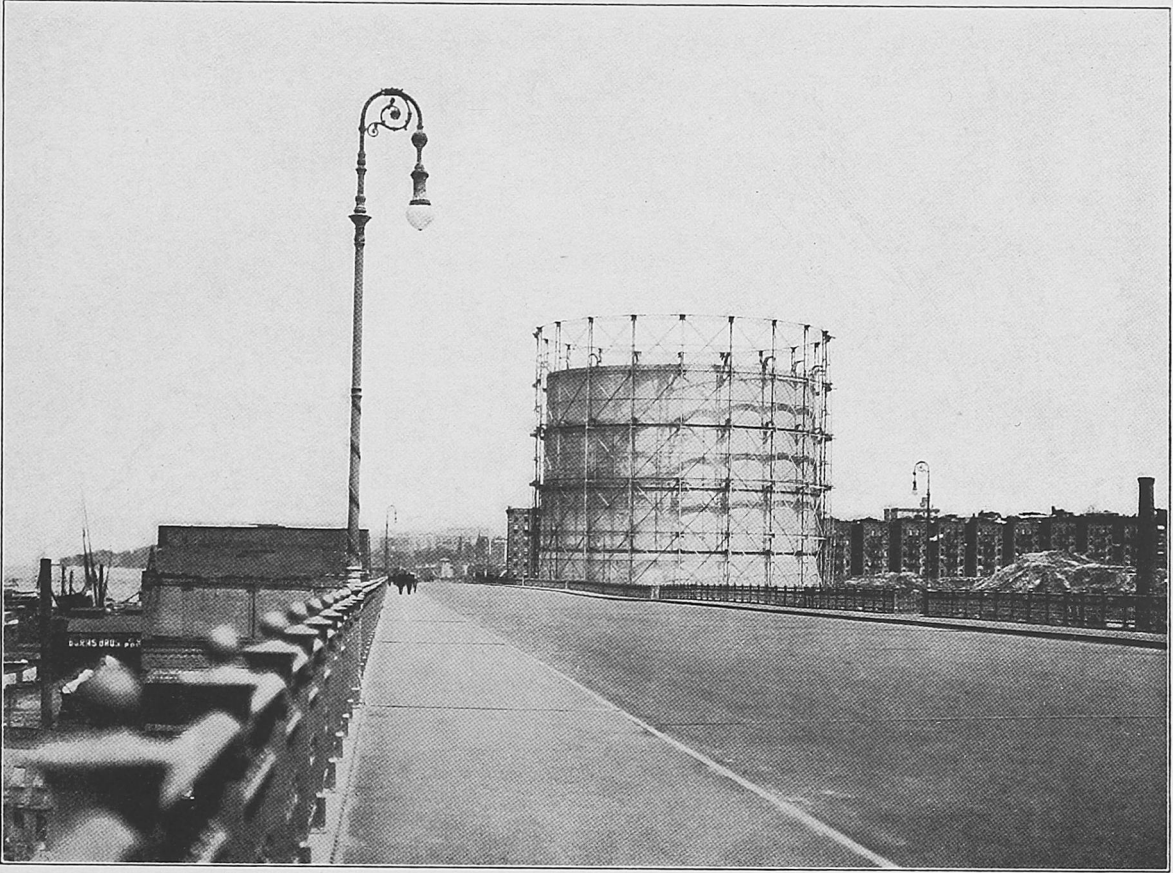
Let the city pass laws forcing every Gas Tank to be covered by a frame designed by some good architect along the lines of a Dome, as here suggested, subject to the approval of the New York Art Commission. Why make other public utilities: bridges, viaducts, bathhouses, fountains, statues, lamp-posts, etc., subject to the approval of the Art Commission and not these huge monstrosities? The expense of the change we suggest, to make tolerably graceful things out of civic pests, would not be vast.

Moreover the gas companies would earn the goodwill of the public, now forced to endure these hideous nuisances, and the good-will of the public is worth having. This good-will could be increased if the companies should, in addition, keep the tanks scrupulously clean, painted, and the grounds about them planted with trees and flowers.

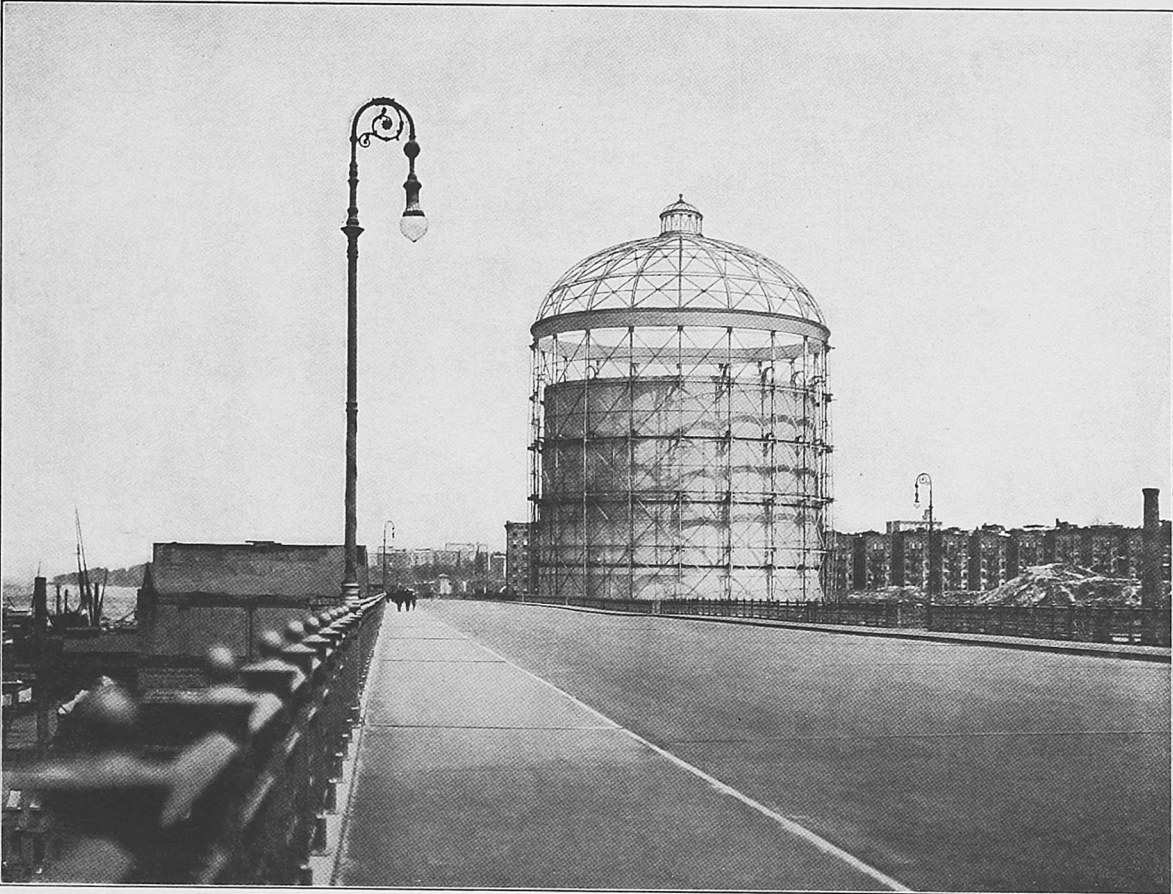
Which gas company will take the hint and be the first to win the favor of our long-suffering citizens in city and country?

THE EDITORS





GAS TANK, RIVERSIDE DRIVE, NEW YORK CITY, CRYING OUT TO BE FINISHED



A SUGGESTED FINISH FOR THE HIDEOUS GAS TANK
Riverside Drive, New York City
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